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HB 5420 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CHEESE SHOP WINE AND BEER PERMIT

Ken Skovron, Proprietor

Darien Cheese & Fine Foods
25-10 Old Kings Highway North
Darien, Connecticut 06820
203.655.4344

Senator Doyle, Representative Baram, Senator Witkos, Representative Carter and the General Law Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on HB 5420 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CHEESE SHOP WINE AND BEER PERMIT. This bill explores the idea of Cheese Shops in the State of Connecticut offering and selling limited amounts of specialty wine and beer.

Darien Cheese & Fine foods is a small family business cheese shop in business since 1967. Our success is founded on quality, service and selection. Over the past forty six years we have watched our community grow in many ways. With much hard work and good business practices Darien Cheese & Fine Foods has too, grown in harmony with our community and its people. Over the past six years or so we have experienced a new type of competition in our community. The Big Box, Big Volume Food Store chains. Within a five mile radius we now have at least six Big Box Stores, Independent and National Grocery Stores all offering cheese and similar products that we offer in our store. Needless to say, our sales have stalled and over the past four years declined by upwards of thirty percent. While rents, taxes, insurance and over all costs of doing business increase, our business suffers.

This past year, the State of Connecticut passed into law Public Act 12-17 (HB 5021) which allows liquor stores to sell cheese and related food items in their stores. Though it makes good sense to have cheese in a liquor store since the two go hand and hand, again, we, the Independent Cheese Shops are put at a competitive disadvantage and experience more lost revenues.

How much can we take before we are forced out of business? If the state can pass bills such as HB 5021 to allow liquor stores to offer cheese and related items in their stores, what can the state do to help the independent cheese shop? How about leveling the playing field to start! Allow Cheese Shops to offer a limited selection of wine and beer so that we can compete fairly and have the much needed opportunity to start growing our businesses again.

Other states like Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York already allow Cheese Shops to sell wine and beer and have experienced positive results for the merchant, customers and state tax revenues. There are many benefits of House Bill 5420.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns and thoughts with you on this matter. I would be happy to answer any questions.